

Parable of the Sower and the Seed

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to the passage that we read together. I want to begin by asking you a question. A question concerning your heart.

What kind of a heart do you have? What kind of a heart do you have? You see, this parable, the parable of the sower, is really a mirror in which you can see yourself and in which you can see your heart's true condition.

You and your heart are represented by one of the following soils pictured in this parable which our Lord Jesus Christ told.

Your heart is either the heart of the soil of the path or the wayside soil or your heart is pictured as the rocky soil or your heart is pictured as the thorny soil or finally your heart is pictured in the good soil that comes at the end of the parable.

I believe the purpose of this parable is not only to identify which kind, which type of heart you have and how you have responded to the preaching of the gospel of God's salvation, the sowing of the seed of the word of God as it's identified in the parable.

[1 : 52] But also, the purpose of the parable is to provide really important teaching or instruction on how you may have a heart that will receive and nourish and protect the seed of the word of God in such a way as that seed planted will eventually bear fruit with patience, as Luke records in his version of the parable.

So the purpose is twofold. It is to identify our hearts, what kind of hearts we have. But it's not fatalistic in that sense.

So this is the heart you have. That is the end of the story. There's nothing no more that can be done. But rather, having identified the heart, it is then the purpose of the parable, I believe, to lead us to receive a heart that will, as I say, receive and nourish and protect the good seed of the word of God so that it ultimately bears fruit in a transformed life to the glory and praise of God.

What is the seed? I've already hinted at what the seed is. Matthew says that the seed that is sown by the sower in the parable represents the word of the kingdom of God.

Mark simply refers to it as the word. And Luke identifies it to his readers as the word of God. The word of God is sown and distributed and scattered and it falls onto different types of hearts or soils.

[3 : 48] But the word, more particularly and specifically, is the word of God that contains the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the sum and substance of the word of God. When the apostles went to preach the word of God, the focus, in each of their cases, was the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see this, don't we, in the story of Philip the Evangelist in Acts chapter 8. When he went down to Samaria to preach the gospel, to take the word of God to the Samaritans, we're told that he preached Christ to them.

That was the sum and substance of the word of God that he proclaimed, Jesus Christ. Because he is the saviour.

He is the salvation that the word of God brings to us. And later when you remember he went from Samaria to the desert road and met the Ethiopian eunuch who was on his way back to Ethiopia having visited as a pilgrim Jerusalem and had obtained a copy of the prophecy of Isaiah and was reading the scroll of the prophecy of Isaiah in his chariot, we're told that Philip went up to him and heard the passage that he was reading, asked him if he understood what he was reading and the Ethiopian invited him up onto the chariot and Philip began at that very place in Isaiah's prophecy to tell him the good news about Jesus.

[5 : 31] So whether to the city of Samaria and all those people there or whether to the individual heading back on his long journey to Ethiopia, Philip preached Jesus Christ to the many and to the

individual.

Jesus Christ is the sum and substance, the focus point of God's word. We see that too, don't we, in the Apostle Paul who, when he went to the city of Corinth, he later wrote to them, he said, I was determined to know nothing among you except this, Jesus Christ and him crucified.

This is the heart of the message. Christ is the heart of the seed that the word of God contains and when we teach and preach the word of God we should never do so without bringing people's attention back to the focal point, the Lord Jesus Christ.

You must encounter him, you must meet with him. There is no salvation apart from him. He has the words of eternal life. There's no other saviour.

And that's why it's so important for gospel, faithful gospel ministers to always preach Christ and to tell people from various parts of the sermon that they preach to look to Jesus Christ because salvation and the power to live a saving life, a saved life is only to be found in him.

[7 : 07] So the sower, the sower initially is Christ himself but the sower in effect is all who come after Jesus Christ who make Jesus Christ known through preaching and teaching and explaining the gospel of the word of God.

And then we come to the different types of soils in the parable. And there are four types of soil as we've mentioned. There's the pathway, there's the rocky soil, there's the thorny soil and there's the good soil.

And it seems to me that there's a natural progression as you read through the parable. A sequence and a progression that almost represents the seasons of the year.

Springtime, summertime, autumn and harvest. The seed is sown and as it's sown it falls upon the path but it doesn't penetrate.

It's left for the birds to eat. So in the spring, in the very moment that it's sown, it's taken away and does not penetrate the soil and bears no fruit.

[8 : 26] With the rocky soil, the seed is sown and it lands in a thin layer of soil above the bedrock and that takes place in the spring and in summer, by summertime, it's grown really quickly but as the sun strikes down upon it and as the soil, soil's moisture is evaporated, because there is no root penetration down into the deep subsoil because of this substratum of rock, the initial fast growth of the plant comes to a sudden end and it withers under the sun, scorched and it dies and it doesn't bear any fruit.

But then there's seed that's sown in springtime and survives the summer and it's coming into the autumn but by this stage, the thorns, the weeds, all different kinds of weeds have sprung up and as we were saying to the children, the thorns are the native plants of the soil and they're so much more vigorous than the seed that is really an exotic, it hasn't been naturally cultivated in the ground, it comes from somewhere else, it's sown but it's sown amongst this enemy, if you like, the thorns, the weeds and the weeds grow fast, it's their natural environment and they suck out the nutrients that are in the soil and they get a head start over the good seed that is sown and it maybe comes up a little but the weeds come up further and overshadow the good seed that has been sown and prevent the light shining down upon it as well as sucking out the nutrients from the soil underneath it and as a result the weeds choke the life out of the good seed that was sown and the good seed does not mature sufficiently to bear any fruit and then finally there is seed that was sown on good soil and summer comes and it survives the sun and the scorching heat and autumn comes and it's been left untouched there are no weeds or thorns to compete with the nourishment underneath or for the sunshine above and when harvest comes there is a plentiful harvest thirty sixty or a hundred fold

I want you to notice the structure of the parable and the amount of space that is given to the teaching with regard to the various types of soil and it seems to me that this structure where we've got so much information about the first three types of soil and then just a little word at the end about the seed that was sown into good soil indicates that there is a focus here in this passage and the focus isn't so much upon the seed that was sown upon the good soil the focus instead is on the various obstacles that stand in the way of the seed that is sown on the path on the rocky soil and on the thorny soil in other words there are many and there are varied reasons for the failure of the crop that part of the parable as I say is quite long and then at the end we come to the short and fairly simple and straightforward statements other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain some a hundred fold some sixty some thirty end of story he who has ears to hear let him hear so the emphasis falls on the reasons for the failure of the seed bearing fruit and therefore this parable calls

on us to be thorough in a searching of our own hearts in an examination of ourselves what kind of soil what kind of heart do we have represented by these three pictures of the pathway soil the thorny soil the rocky soil what kind of heart do we have how have we responded to the word of God what is there in our lives that threaten the harvest let's look at these soils a little bit more closely the path first of all now ask yourself the question why does the seed that is sown on the path not bear fruit in the end the simple answer is this because the seed is not taken in literally it's not taken in it remains on the surface and before long the birds of the air come and take it away but why is the seed not taken in because it falls upon the path and the path is hard and the seed doesn't penetrate below the surface it doesn't sink down into the soil but why is the path hard because the path is a thoroughfare it is the part of the field across which everybody walks and the effect of their feet tramping on this same piece of ground is to beat the ground down into a hard firm track of land upon which and in which nothing grows so what causes our hearts to become like a hard path well think of the analogy in the parable because the spiritual hardness is like the natural hardness described in the parable both with regard to the cause of it and also the character of it the cause of it why is the path hard because it's a thoroughfare because people constantly walk across it why can the human heart be so hard so that the seed of the word of god the word of christ doesn't penetrate it it is because there is a host of worldly cares and concerns that in effect tramp over the heart day after day and year after year and that has quite literally an impact the heart like the path is not fenced off like a protected garden keep off the grass signs all around it no no it's like an uncultivated piece of common land across which everyone and everything can cross and when we apply that to the human heart well we think of a person who is just full of worldly cares they live for the things of this life the Lord's words enter into your closet shut the door spend time alone with God on your knees before God with the

Bible open before you examine yourself search your heart these words are not known to such a person or if they are known they are never put into practice and what happens if we don't do that that thing that the Lord encourages us and commands us to do well it has an effect upon us as a result the soil of this heart as it were is trodden by all comers it's never broken up it's never softened by self examination it's hard and the word the seed of the word doesn't penetrate and it becomes insensitive calloused insensitive to both good and evil nothing seems to affect it you speak about the terrors of the Lord and the day of judgment and hell and eternal punishment the heart doesn't tremble at such divine certainties and realities where you talk about the sweetness of the gospel that God so loved the world this sinful rebellious world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish should not perish but have everlasting life and there's nothing there's no response the seed of the word just sits on the surface for a moment or two and then another passerby comes another distracting thought arises and the birds of the air come down and snatch the seed that was sown in the heart what's the difference between the past soil and the good soil

[20 : 00] I have to say that and I'm not an expert in agriculture that's to say that there's really no difference in terms of the substance and makeup of the soil the only difference is that one has been broken up by the plough and the harrow so that the seed falls down and takes root in the soil that's the only difference so if your heart is hard how can you make it like that fourth heart pictured by the good soil I think it's Luke that calls it the honest and good heart that bears fruit of patience well there's a command tucked away at the end of one of the

Old Testament prophetic books Hosea chapter 10 and verse 12 and it says this break up your fallow ground break up your fallow ground you got a hard heart you need to break up your fallow ground you need to break up your hard heart how do you break up your fallow ground in that sense well look into your heart look into your heart honestly before God on your knees look into your heart and see the sin that dwells within your heart and look at it until you begin to grieve over it and become sad for it and then look to Jesus Christ Jesus Christ came into the world to pay the price of sin he came to die in the place of sinners look to

Jesus Christ bearing sin until you begin to love the Lord Jesus Christ because of his love for sinners and then in prayer tell God openly frankly honestly that your heart is hard that your heart is barren that no good thing dwells in it only these sinful things these sinful thoughts and sinful actions and plead with God that he would send his Holy Spirit to make your heart tender and then place your heart holding absolutely nothing back in reserve into the Saviour's hands and ask the Saviour to take every ounce of hardness out of it and to make it a new heart have you ever invited the one who

is described in the

Bible as the eternal word to come and to make his home within you because when Christ begins to dwell in your heart by faith things begin to change a godly sorrow deep within your heart will soften every part of your nature so that the fruit of the Holy Spirit will appear and begin to grow and develop until full maturity is reached on the surface of your life you cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit unless within your heart is the Spirit of God the Lord Jesus Christ dwelling in your heart by faith the rocky soil then is the second soil we need to look at a little bit more closely why does the seed not bear fruit when sown in rocky soil ask that question and the answer is because it doesn't have any root so what appears to be promising at first is stunted in its growth and soon withers away and dies at the first sign of trouble and persecution that arises because of the word and this picture is such an important picture for us from a pastoral point of view it's very very important to understand that there are certain positive signs that may appear in people's lives that cannot be relied upon as evidences that they truly know the

Lord and are saved because here is someone in the parable who hears the word of God preached and he immediately receives it and Mark and Luke says they receive the word with joy so there's a fast quick response to the word doesn't appear that they have a hard heart fast response to the word and a joyful response to the word and then the initial growth in grace seems to be rapid and seems to outstrip the growth of the seeds that have been sown into the good soil the deeper soil all around it but friends this is not a sign of grace powerfully at work rather it's a sign that there is a lack of depth in the soil which has received the seed of the word of the gospel the gospel may come to men and women who may be emotionally affected by its message and because of the effect of certain maybe background aspects of what we might call

[26 : 10] Christian culture upon them they may receive the gospel and profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and that profession of faith in Christ may appear by its strength and vigor to be absolutely genuine to them and to others but it is shown up for what it really is by how it reacts to the inevitable hardships and difficulties that will come along what Luke refers to as a time of testing and to what Matthew and Mark refer to as tribulation or persecution on account of the word and in all such circumstances of testing and persecution and tribulation because of the word of Christ the one who received the word with joy and who seemed to make such vigorous progress in their Christian life and walk turns away and the good seed withers and dies without fruit friends what should we do if we think we have a rocky soiled heart like this well the first thing is to heed the words of

Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 12 let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls one old writer said a deeper sense of sin clearer views of the gospel warmer love to Christ these are the safeguards of backsliding when persecution and trouble comes friends don't keep Christ on the surface like the seed sown in rocky soil let Christ enter and possess your whole heart and your whole soul and then when trouble comes as sure it will in one form or another with Christ in the vessel this is what we were taught when we were children we can smile at the storm we will not give up and turn away because

Christ deep in our hearts will give us the strength to endure the trouble and the persecution and the testing and to come through to the end then quickly the thorny soil that represents the thorns represent any species of useless weeds that occupy the ground and that injures the crop and the Lord's own application of this part of the parable points us to what these weeds are the cares of this world and deceitfulness of riches Mark adds the desire for other things and Luke adds the pleasures of life thorns of this kind cause injury to the tender plants in two ways they compete with the good seed for the nutrients in the soil and being more natural native and stronger than the sown seed if these weeds are left unattended they will quickly exhaust the soil of its goodness and destroy the development of the grain to maturity and then secondly the weeds will grow quicker and more vigorously than the good seed of the grain and will soon overshadow the good plants blocking out the sunshine and stealing the much needed light for the good plants to grow and thrive and produce fruit so without the nourishment that comes from the soil and the sun the good seed though partially developed in and through the spring time and the summer time will not produce fruit at harvest time so what can we learn from this part of the parable if we fear that our hearts resemble the picture drawn by the thorny soil well the good seed must be nourished and protected it must be how do we do that we do it by prayer by reading the bible by coming to church regularly where we sing with our hearts where we pray with our hearts where we read the bible with our hearts where

we listen to the preaching with our hearts and where we spend time in soul strengthening fellowship with other believers these are the simple basic things of the

Christian life and these are the things that the Lord uses to help protect and to give life to strengthen the good seed that is sown in our hearts and secondly the cares deceitfulness of riches desires for other things the pleasures of life how do we deal with these insidious weeds what do we do with the cares of this world the things that concern us the things that make us anxious Peter says cast all your care upon him he cares for us Jesus says seek first the kingdom of God and all these things that we worry about like food and clothes and drink all these things will be added unto us as well learn the lessons from the birds and the flowers the father feeds the birds the worthless birds he feeds them he cares for them he clothes the lilies of the field

Solomon in all his splendor was not arrayed like one of these lilies Jesus says if your father clothed the lilies surely he will clothe you because you're of much greater value than they cast all your care upon him because he cares for you let not these things so occupy your attention your mind that there's no energy and strength left for the things of God deceitfulness of riches pleasures of this life how do we keep these weeds at bay how do we root them out how do we burn them by making Christ our life and our joy by making him everything to us our all in all and if we make

[33 : 25] Christ the portion of our hearts if we make him the thing that we rejoice in and enjoy in the most then these lesser things will never hold the same attraction for us the new affection that God has planted in our hearts for his son the Lord Jesus Christ will have what Thomas Chalmers called an expulsive power that keeps out other things then remembered what Jesus said about Lot's wife remember Lot's wife she looked back longingly for the things of Sodom and never reached the place of safety there's some times we just have to say to ourselves when temptation arises in our hearts don't even think about it don't even think about it don't look back look unto

Jesus and make that a constant constant thing continual thing looking unto Jesus and the desires for other things well if we don't keep putting Jesus first in various practical and devotional ways in our lives if we don't guard a portion of the day where we expose our souls to his all searching eye and call upon him for his daily grace to keep us strong and healthy as believers if we don't do these things give ourselves to these things then we leave our hearts open to what we might call alien invasion the invasion of these noxious weeds we've got to weed out certain things from our lives as well as feed our faith in these ways that's why the Lord

Jesus said to his disciples watch and pray lest you fall into temptation that's why Jude wrote to the believers in his day and told them amongst other things to keep yourselves in the love of God and Jesus said to the disciples as others began to defect from Jesus do you also want to go away remember Peter's response to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life and that should be our attitude as well when these things come in the desire for other things and as we get older these things don't lessen it actually gets worse doesn't it as we get older the desire for other things to distract us from the straight and the narrow from following

Jesus to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life we're sticking with you what kind of a heart do you have is it hard like the path shallow like the rocky soil is it distracted to the cares of this world by the deceitfulness of riches by the desire for other things by the pleasures of life or do you have a good and honest heart that has received the word of God and is producing and will continue to produce until the end 30 fold 60 fold 100 fold he who perseveres to the end shall be saved Jesus himself said that and he alone is the one who gives us daily grace to see it through not to the bitter end to the glorious end may God bless his word to us let us pray our heavenly father your word has been given to us to teach us to rebuke us to correct us to instruct us in righteousness and we thank you for that that we might be men and women of God thoroughly equipped for every good work give us soft tender hearts that will receive your word store it deep within us and produce the fruit in keeping with a true faith in

[39 : 23] Jesus Christ and a true repentance from all known sin may your word dwell in us which we ask this in Jesus name amen psalm 33 and sing psalms is our closing praise for the morning we're going to sing from verse 12 to the end of the psalm and the tune is epiphany favored and blessed is the nation he's chosen whose God the Lord is throughout every age blessed are the people he called to be near him those whom he chose as his own heritage he